

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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FM AMEMBASSY GABORONE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2946
INFO AMEMBASSY DARESSALAAM
AMEMBASSY LUSAKA
AMEMBASSY MAPUTO
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
USLO PEKING
AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 GABORONE 2588

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PDEV, PINT, PCAT, BC, UR
SUBJECT: USSR/GOB RELATIONS: THE FIRST TWO YEARS

1. SUMMARY: THIS TELEGRAM SUMMARIZES AIRGRAM POUCHED
TO ADDRESSEES WHICH REVIEWS THE UPS AND DOWNS OF BOTSWANA/
USSR RESIDENT RELATIONS ESTABLISHED SEPTEMBER 1976 AND
ATTEMPTS TO IDENTIFY SOME OF THE FACTORS WHICH HAVE MADE
THE RELATIONSHIP SO VOLATILE. PRIMARY FINDING OF THE
STUDY IS THAT, DESPITE A SIGNIFICANT SOVIET EFFORT TO GAIN
NEW INFLUENCE IN BOTSWANA, THE USSR IS PROBABLY NO CLOSER
TO ACHIEVING ITS POLITICAL, MILITARY, AND CULTURAL OBJEC-
TIVES THAN IT WAS WHEN RESIDENT RELATIONS WERE ESTABLISHED
ALMOST TWO YEARS AGO. END SUMMARY.

2. SOVIET INCENTIVES IN BOTSWANA: WITH THE FAILURE OF
THE GENEVA CONFERENCE ON RHODESIA IN NOVEMBER 1976, IT
BECAME EVIDENT THAT USSR WOULD ACTIVELY SUPPORT
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INTENSIFIED ARMED STRUGGLE BY ZIMBABWEAN NATIONALIST
GROUPS (PARTICULARLY ZAPU) AND FRONTLINE STATES.
SOVIET SOUTHERN AFRICAN STRATEGY ALSO INCLUDED AN
EFFORT TO WIN NEW INFLUENCE IN THE MOST CON-
SERVATIVE, AND MOST VULNERABLE FRONTLINE STATE, BOTS-
WANA.

3. SOVIET PROSPECTS IN BOTSWANA APPEARED TO BE IMPROVING FOR FOLLOWING REASONS:

A. IN EFFORT TO DEAL WITH FREQUENT RHODESIAN INCURSIONS OF ITS BORDER, GOB HAD DECIDED FOR FIRST TIME TO ORGANIZE A NATIONAL ARMY. IN VIEW OF PRESSING NEED FOR ARMS AND EQUIPMENT FOR BOTSWANA DEFENSE FORCE (BDF), SOVIET PUBLIC AND PRIVATE OFFERS OF MILITARY ASSISTANCE WERE TIMELY.

B. TENSIONS BETWEEN GOB AND ITS TRADITIONAL WESTERN FRIENDS OVER UK AND US ABSTENTIONS ON JANUARY 1977 UN SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION CONDEMNING RHODESIAN ATTACKS ON BOTSWANA APPEARED TO PROVIDE OPENING FOR NEW SOVIET INFLUENCE.

C. ENERGETIC PRC ACTIVITIES IN BOTSWANA MAY ALSO HAVE PROVIDED INCENTIVE FOR NEW SOVIET EFFORT.

4. SOVIET DILEMMAS IN BOTSWANA: SOVIET ATTEMPTS TO ACQUIRE EXPANDED INFLUENCE IN BOTSWANA HAVE BEEN BESET BY A NUMBER OF PROBLEMS, INCLUDING INABILITY OR UNWILLINGNESS TO DEVELOP A PROGRAM OF EFFECTIVE ECONOMIC AID TO GOB. A SECOND SERIOUS AND PERSISTENT DILEMMA FACING SOVIETS INVOLVED SMALL, PRO-SOVIET MARXIST OPPOSITION POLITICAL PARTY, THE BOTSWANA NATIONAL FRONT (BNF). CLOSE SOVIET TIES WITH BNF HAVE ANTAGONIZED GOB LEADERSHIP AND UNDERMINED SOVIET EFFORTS TO EXERT GREATER INFLUENCE ON STATE-CONFIDENTIAL

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TO-STATE LEVEL. INSTEAD OF RESOLVING BNF DILEMMA THROUGH POLICY DECISION, SOVIETS HAVE TRIED TO HAVE THEIR CAKE AND EAT IT TOO WITH SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES FOR USSR/BOTSWANA RELATIONS. FINALLY, SOVIET PENCHANT FOR SECRECY AND INSENSITIVITY TO GOB COORDINATING ROLE IN DISTRIBUTION TO BOTSWANA OF FOREIGN SCHOLARSHIPS HAVE APPEARED TO NEEDLESSLY ANTAGONIZE GOB.

5. THE SOVIET EFFORT: PERMANENT SOVIET PRESENCE IN GABORONE WAS ESTABLISHED SEPTEMBER 13 1976 WITH ARRIVAL OF CHARGE DIMITRY MARKOV AND HIS FAMILY. SOVIET AMBASSADOR TO ZAMBIA SOLODOVNIKOV, WHO IS REPUTED TO BE USSR'S LEADING "AFRICANIST", HEADED SOVIET DELEGATION TO BOTSWANA'S 10TH INDEPENDENCE ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION IN SEPTEMBER 1976. WHILE UK AND US ABSTAINED, SOVIETS STRONGLY SUPPORTED UN SECURITY COUNCIL MAJORITY WHICH CONDEMNED RHODESIAN ATTACKS ON BOTSWANA IN JANUARY 1977. HOWEVER, THESE EFFORTS APPEARED TO WIN USSR LITTLE POLITICAL CAPITAL IN GABORONE, PARTICULARLY IN VIEW OF NEW US AND UK ACTIVISM ON SOUTHERN AFRICA ISSUES.

6. SOVIET ARMS OFFER IGNORED: DURING DECEMBER 1976 PRESS CONFERENCE IN LUSAKA, AMBASSADOR SOLODOVNIKOV MADE PUBLIC OFFER OF ARMS ASSISTANCE TO BOTSWANA. ALTHOUGH ARMS OFFER WAS TIMELY IN VIEW OF GOB DECISION TO ORGANIZE BDF IN APRIL 1977, BOTSWANA INSTEAD TURNED TO US AND UK TO REQUEST ARMS AND MILITARY ADVICE. ACCORDING TO GOB OFFICIALS THIS WAS "CONSCIOUS POLITICAL DECISION" WHICH REFLECTED "COMMON ATTACHMENT TO DEMOCRACY AND DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES" AND CONFIDENCE THAT US WOULD NOT USE ARMS TO EXERT "PRESSURE" ON GOB (77 GABORONE 1894). ALTHOUGH USG HAS TO DATE BEEN UNABLE TO SET UP ARMS SUPPLY RELATIONSHIP WITH GOB, BOTSWANA CONTINUES TO IGNORE SOVIET ARMS OFFER WHICH PRESUMABLY STILL STANDS.
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7. EDUCATION AND CULTURE: SOVIET EFFORT SINCE 1976 HAS BEEN SUBSTANTIAL, INCLUDING RECENT OFFER OF 25 SOVIET SCHOLARSHIPS DURING 1979-80 ACADEMIC YEAR.

HOWEVER, GOB RESPONSE TO SOVIET SCHOLARSHIP OFFERS HAS BEEN LUKEWARM BECAUSE OF CONCERNS OVER HEAVY DOSES OF IDEOLOGICAL INSTRUCTION GIVEN AFRICAN STUDENTS IN USSR. GOB EDUCATION MINISTER MORAKE VISITED USSR IN JUNE 1978 FOR TALKS WITH "SOVIET GOVERNMENT AND BATSWANA STUDYING IN THAT COUNTRY". AFTER MORAKE'S RETURN, GOB ANNOUNCED INTERVIEWS TO FILL SOVIET SCHOLARSHIP OFFERS INDICATING THAT BOTSWANA'S CONCERNS OVER EDUCATION OF BOTSWANA IN USSR HAD BEEN AT LEAST SOMEWHAT RELIEVED BY VISIT. HOWEVER, IT IS TOO EARLY TO CONCLUDE THAT SIGNIFICANT PROBLEMS WHICH HAVE TROUBLED SOVIET SCHOLARSHIP AID TO BOTSWANA HAVE BEEN FULLY RESOLVED.

8. CONTROVERSY SURROUNDING SOVIET/CUBAN INVITATIONS
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TO BOTSWANA TO ATTEND JULY 1978 WORLD YOUTH FESTIVAL IN HAVANA ILLUSTRATES CONTINUING PROBLEMS FACING USSR IN ITS EFFORTS TO GAIN GREATER INFLUENCE IN BOTSWANA. ON JUNE 21, GOB UNEXPECTEDLY ANNOUNCED TEMPORARY WITHDRAWAL OF PASSPORTS OF 17 BNF MEMBERS WHO HAD RECEIVED CUBAN INVITATIONS AND SOVIET FINANCIAL SUPPORT (INCLUDING AIR TICKETS) TO ATTEND FESTIVAL. GOB STATEMENT EXPLAINING ITS ACTION ALLEGED THAT BNF MEMBERS WERE PLANNING TRAVEL TO "SOME OTHER COUNTRY" FOR MILITARY TRAINING AND INSTRUCTION IN SUBVERSIVE ACTIVITIES. STATEMENT ALLEGED THAT HAVANA FESTIVAL WAS COVER FOR RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING OF YOUNG BATSWANA WHO WOULD HELP BNF SEIZE POWER UNCONSTITUTIONALLY. OUR SUBSEQUENT CONVERSATIONS WITH GOB OFFICIALS, INCLUDING EXTAFF MIN MOGWE AND PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR TIBONE, UNDERSCORE GOB RESENTMENT AT SOVIET CIRCUMVENTION OF ESTABLISHED PROCEDURES TO SHOWER BNF MEMBERS WITH PREPAID TICKETS TO HAVANA BY WAY OF THE SOVIET UNION. HAVANA FESTIVAL AFFAIR SERVED TO BRING SOVIET DILEMMA OVER TIES WITH BNF INTO THE OPEN AND REPRESENTED A SIGNIFICANT SETBACK FOR SOVIET POLICY IN BOTSWANA.

9. CONCLUSION: ONE STEP FORWARD, TWO STEPS BACK. SOVIET POLICY IN BOTSWANA SINCE ESTABLISHMENT OF RELATIONS IN 1976 MIGHT BE SUMMED UP BY THE TITLE OF V.O. LENIN'S 1904 POLEMIC AGAINST HIS OPPONENTS WITHIN THE RUSSIAN SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT, ONE STEP FORWARD, TWO STEPS BACK. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF RESIDENT RELATIONS WAS IN ITSELF CLEARLY A STEP FORWARD FOR SOVIET POLICY IN BOTSWANA, AND IT FACILITATED OTHER SOVIET EFFORTS IN THE POLITICAL, MILITARY AND CULTURAL FIELDS. HOWEVER, OPPORTUNITIES FOR EX-

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PANSION OF SOVIET INFLUENCE HAVE NOT BEEN SUCCESSFULLY EXPLOITED. IN FACT THE SOVIETS NOW APPEAR TO BE NO CLOSER TO ACHIEVING THEIR POLITICAL MILITARY AND CULTURAL GOALS IN BOTSWANA THAN THEY WERE WHEN RESIDENT RELATIONS WERE ESTABLISHED.

ALTHOUGH SOVIET EFFORTS TO ATTAIN GREATER INFLUENCE IN BOTSWANA WILL CONTINUE, IT APPEARS THAT MOSCOW REMAINS UNABLE TO RESOLVE THE DILEMMAS WHICH HAVE UNDERMINED SOVIET EFFORTS TO DATE. IN PARTICULAR, THE USSR APPARENTLY HAS NO PLANS TO DEVELOP AN ECONOMIC AID EFFORT WHICH WOULD DEMONSTRATE SOVIET WILLINGNESS TO PARTICIPATE EFFECTIVELY IN BOTSWANA'S DEVELOPMENT. IN THE WAKE OF THE HAVANA FESTIVAL AFFAIR, SOVIET INABILITY TO RESOLVE THE CONTINUING PROBLEMS SURROUNDING RELATIONS WITH THE BNF REPRESENTS A CONTINUING SOURCE OF FRICTION BETWEEN THE USSR AND THE GOB.

THE PROBLEM OF SOUTH AFRICA ITSELF IS LIKELY TO CREATE NEW PROBLEMS FOR THE USSR IN MANAGING ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH BOTSWANA. WHATEVER THE OUTCOME OF THE CURRENT CRISIS IN RHODESIA, RADICAL AFRICAN STATES AND SOUTH AFRICAN LIBERATION GROUPS WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY STEP UP THE PRESSURE ON BOTSWANA TO PERMIT ITS TERRITORY TO BE USED AS A SANCTUARY FOR GUERRILLA BANDS OPERATING AGAINST SOUTH AFRICA. SOVIET AID TO SOUTH AFRICAN LIBERATION GROUPS IN THE FORM OF WEAPONS AND MILITARY TRAINING IS ALREADY BEING PROVIDED AND WILL UNDOUBTEDLY BE STEPPED UP. FUTURE SOVIET ENCOURAGEMENT OF SOUTH AFRICAN LIBERATION GROUP ACTIVITIES IN BOTSWANA COULD BRING MOSCOW INTO CONFLICT WITH GOB LEADERS WHO CANNOT AFFORD TO PROVOKE SOUTH AFRICAN MILITARY AND ECONOMIC REPRISALS. IF FUTURE SOVIET ACTIVITIES ARE PERCEIVED AS CONFLICTING WITH GOB DETERMINATION TO CONTROL ITS OWN TERRITORY, USSR/GOB STATE-TO-STATE RELATIONS ARE CERTAIN TO BE ADVERSELY AFFECTED.

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FINALLY, THE FUTURE OF USSR/GOB RELATIONS WILL BE INEVITABLY AFFECTED BY BOTSWANA'S RELATIONS WITH ITS TRADITIONAL FRIENDS IN THE WEST. BOTSWANA'S PRO-WESTERN ORIENTATION HAS DEPENDED, TO A CONSIDERABLE DEGREE, ON PRESIDENT KHAMA'S LEADERSHIP. WE BELIEVE THAT POLICY AND ORIENTATION IS WIDELY

SHARED WITHIN THE GOB AND BY A LARGE MAJORITY OF
THE PEOPLE. AS LONG AS THE PRESENT POLICY WORKS,
E.G., IF WESTERN COUNTRIES ARE RESPONSIVE TO
GOB PRIORITY NEEDS, PRESIDENT KHAMA'S SUCCESSORS CAN
BE EXPECTED TO MAINTAIN IT. THE SEVEREST TESTS ARE
YET TO COME, HOWEVER, INCLUDING THE RELIABILITY OF THE
WEST AS THE PRIMARY SOURCE OF MATERIAL AND PSYCHOLO-
GICAL SUPPORT FOR THE GOB. THE PERIOD OF SUCCESSION
TO PRESIDENT KHAMA WILL BE ONE KEY TEST. IN PREPAR-
ATION FOR THE TRAILS AHEAD, WE SHOULD LOSE NO
OPPORTUNITY NOW TO SHOW UNSTINTING SUPPORT FOR BOTS-
WANA. ANY FAILURE TO DO SO WILL CREATE FRESH OPPOR-
TUNITIES FOR SOVIET INFLUENCE AND PRESENCE IN BOTS-
WANA.
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